

LANDER COUNTY LINE

FOLKLIFE IN CENTRAL NEVADA

*An essay in words and pictures by
Andrea Graham and Blanton Owen
Folk Arts Program, Nevada State
Council on the Arts, 1988*



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Barn door,
Vaughn Ranch,
Reese River Valley.

Cover:
Vaughn Ranch.
Barn and corrals,
Reese River Valley.



INTRODUCTION

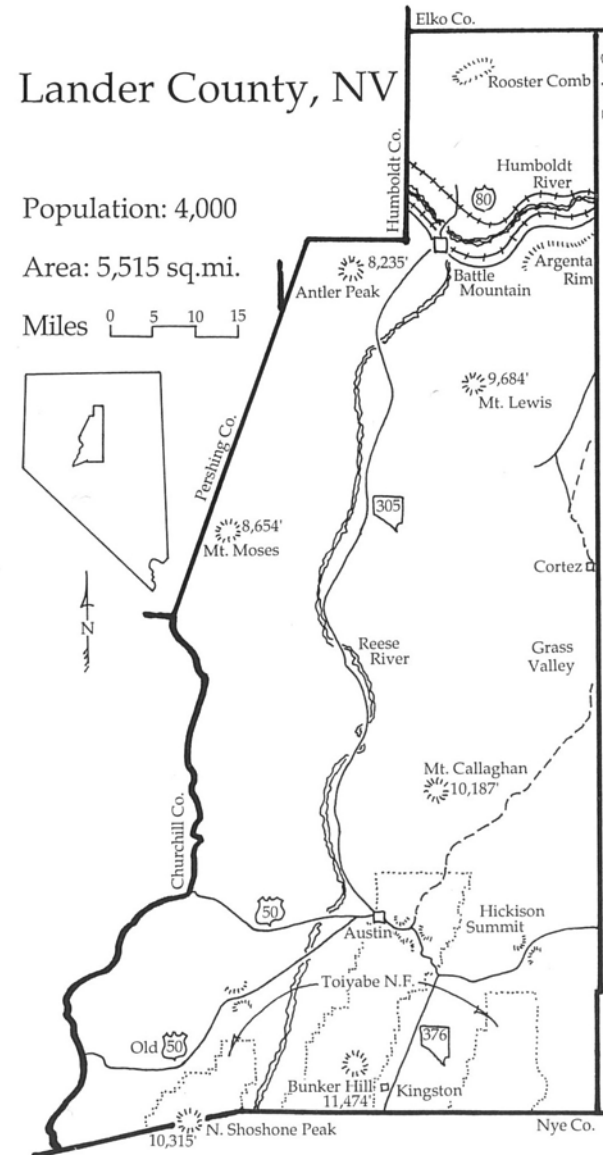
Folklore refers to the traditional lore, skills and knowledge through which a group maintains and passes on its shared way of life. A group may be defined by religion, occupation, geographic region, ethnicity, age or sex. All of us belong to a number of groups, and all of us share traditional knowledge with others.

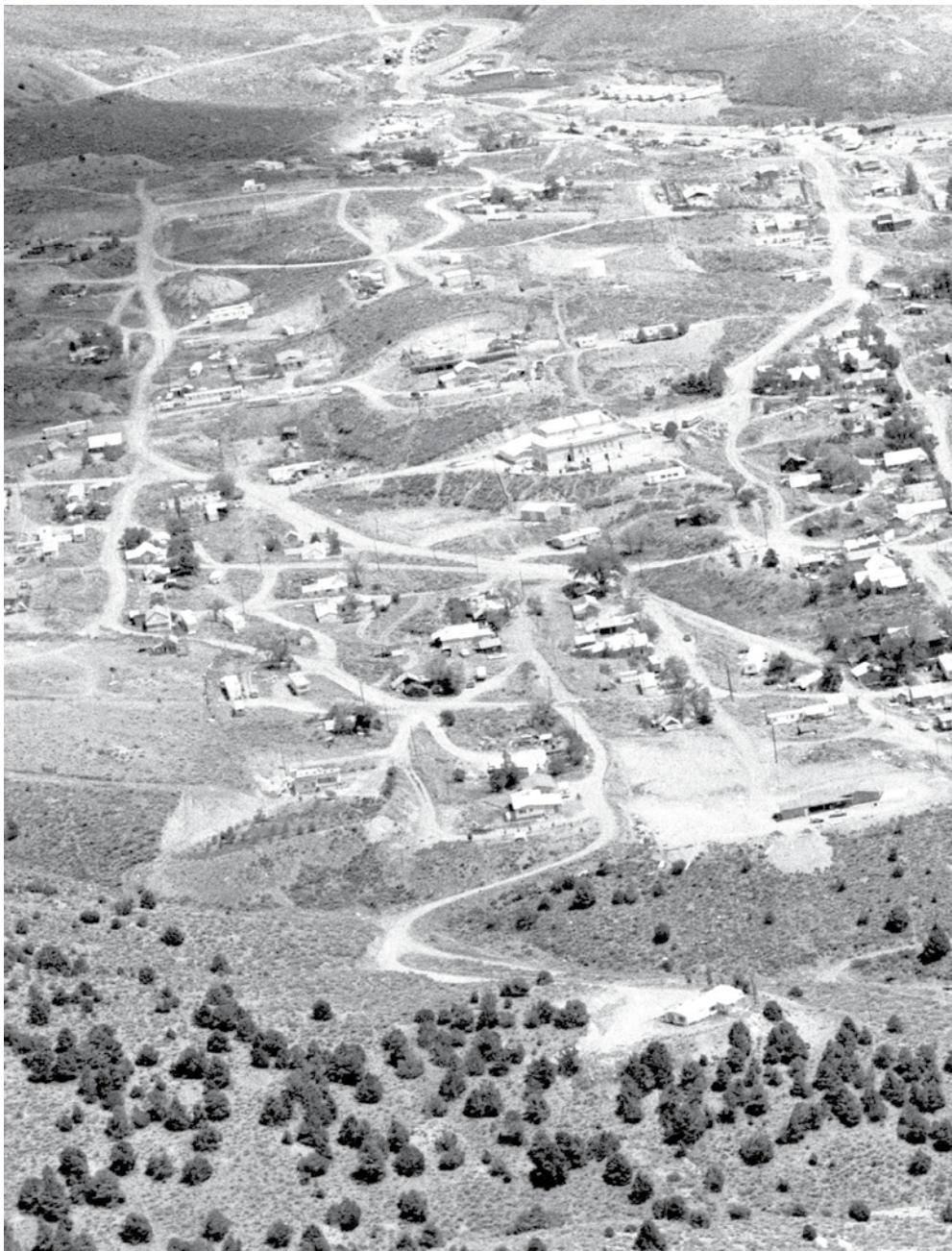
Between March 24 and May 8, 1988, folklorist Andrea Graham spent 25 days (and nights) documenting Lander County's traditional life. She interviewed more than 40 people about what they do and how they do it; took 2,200 photographs of material folk culture and traditional activities including house types, horse gear, braided rugs, rawhide and horse-hair braiding, and cow doctoring; and recorded her observations and impressions in a daily field log. The booklet *Lander County Line: Folklife in Central Nevada* was a condensed version of Andrea's field diary.

The Lander County Folklife Survey was the second such project in a series planned for Nevada by the Nevada State Council on the Arts. The intent of the folklife survey was to obtain a broad overview of the traditions found within the county and, through this publication and the exhibition it originally accompanied, to celebrate this shared traditional heritage.

The survey was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts/Folk Arts Program, and conducted with the active support of the Austin Ranger District of the Toiyabe National Forest, United States Forest Service, and the Austin Chamber of Commerce.

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Austin, looking east.

LANDER COUNTY LINE

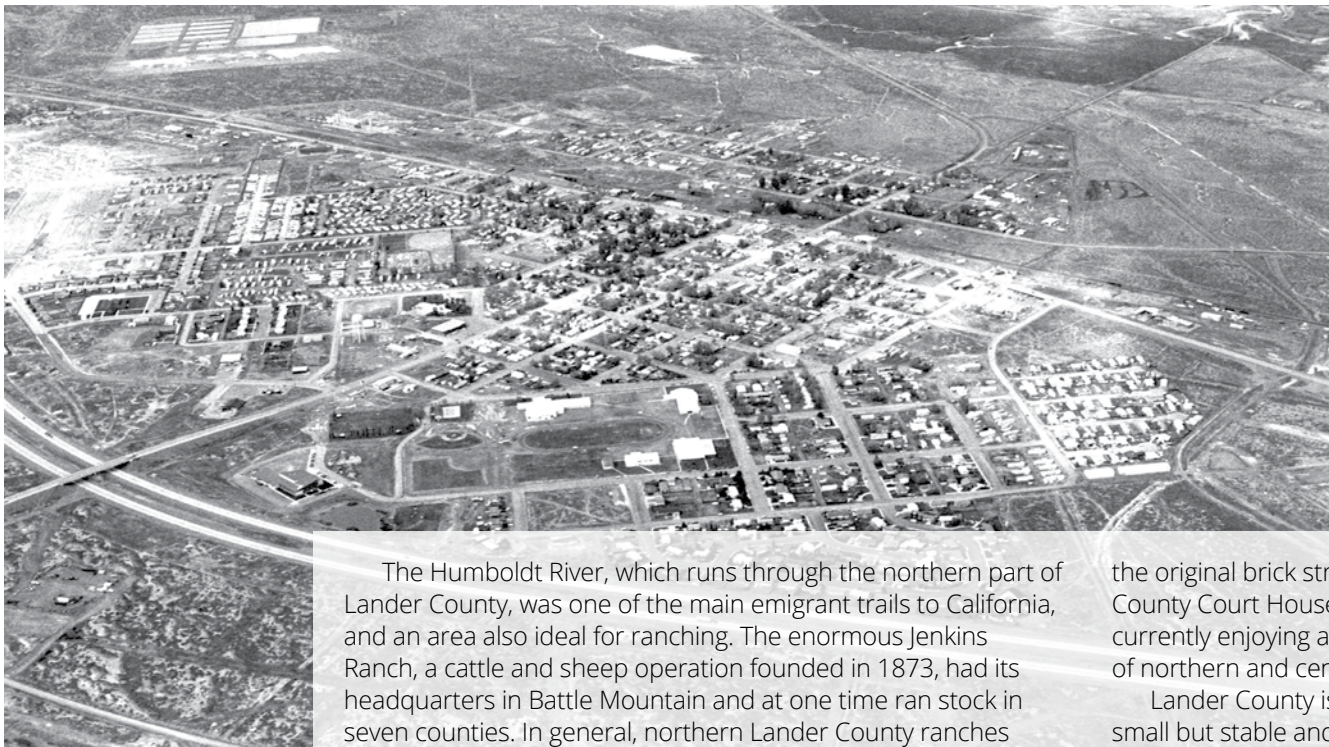
FOLKLIFE IN CENTRAL NEVADA

MARCH 23

A small green highway sign is the only indication that you have crossed into Lander County. Whether you approach on old Highway 50 from the west over Carroll Summit (the route of the Pony Express and the Overland Stage through the Desatoya Range), or come up Big Smoky Valley from the south past scattered ranches, or drive through on Interstate 80, the basin and range landscape is so typically Nevadan that Lander County may go by with hardly a glance from the passing tourist. Lander's geography is Nevada's geography.

Likewise, Lander's history mirrors Nevada's history. The county's first settlement was the silver mining town of Austin, established in 1862—a classic boom-bust enterprise that is often called the “Mother of Mining Camps” because prospectors who set out from there discovered the ores that founded such towns as Eureka, Lone and Hamilton. The brick and adobe houses that still crowd Austin's steep streets and the three fine brick churches crowning its skyline attest to the wealth and prosperity the town enjoyed during its short boom. The continued presence of Lander County's early families—Gandolfos, Dorys, Maestrettis, Streshleys, Williamses—says a lot about the strength of Austin's roots.

The rapid growth of Austin in the 1860s created a demand for food, animals, and hay; and thus the growth of ranching paralleled that of Austin, Kingston, and other mining operations. The Reese River Valley to the west of the towering Toiyabe Range and the well-watered canyons to the east in Smoky Valley were prime ranching areas, as was Grass Valley to the north.



Battle Mountain, looking northwest. The original town was platted with streets perpendicular and parallel to the railroad, and now lies between I-80 and the tracks.

The Humboldt River, which runs through the northern part of Lander County, was one of the main emigrant trails to California, and an area also ideal for ranching. The enormous Jenkins Ranch, a cattle and sheep operation founded in 1873, had its headquarters in Battle Mountain and at one time ran stock in seven counties. In general, northern Lander County ranches tended to be larger operations, while those in the southern part of the county were small family outfits.

In contrast to Austin, the classic mining camp, Battle Mountain began life as a quintessential Nevada railroad town when the Central Pacific came through in 1868. The construction of the Nevada Central, connecting Austin with the main line to the north in 1880, made Battle Mountain a transportation hub and along with some mining and the ranches provided the town's reason for being.

Battle Mountain and Austin are completely different in character, starting with the way they are laid out on the land. Austin sprawls up a narrow canyon, in the heart of the ore-rich Toiyabes. Its buildings are adobe and brick and stone, built to impress and built to stay. Battle Mountain is on the flat, laid out along the train tracks and oriented toward them. Houses are of frame or railroad ties, and reflect the less wealthy but steady and persevering nature of their inhabitants.

Austin's flashy cycles of growth and decay and Battle Mountain's unspectacular but solid persistence have created some tension between the northern and southern halves of the county. The most obvious example of this was the running battle to move the county seat from Austin. The fight was finally ended in 1980 when Battle Mountain gained the honor, although

the original brick structure in Austin still has the words "Lander County Court House" marching across its facade. Both towns are currently enjoying another boom in the cycle of mining, as is much of northern and central Nevada.

Lander County is typical of Nevada in many ways. It has a small but stable and proud Shoshone Indian population. Formerly a nomadic people, they now live mostly at the Battle Mountain Indian Colony and the Yomba Reservation, which is actually in Nye County near the head of Reese River. The county's later settlers represent many nations, as a perusal of the names in the phone book, on local businesses, or in the cemetery will confirm. They came from Ireland, Scotland, France, Canada, the Basque Country, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Mexico, and many of them are still here: Casady, Campbell, Lemaire, Dory, Inchauspe, Baumann, Filippini, Walti, Jaramillo.

It is exactly because Lander County is so representative, because its culture is a microcosm of the state, that it is so interesting. Its relatively small population, just over 4,000, makes it accessible. Culture is ideas, and a place's culture cannot be understood by generalizations, by broad historical trends; it must be approached through individuals. The Lander County Folklife Survey was intended to seek out individuals, to study and document their traditional ways of life, and from them gain a deeper knowledge of the region's unique culture and how it persists in the Nevada of the 1980s. Life is in the details.

On March 23, 1988, the peaks of the Toiyabes came into view as I drove toward Austin on Highway 50. I had crossed the Lander County line.

MARCH 24

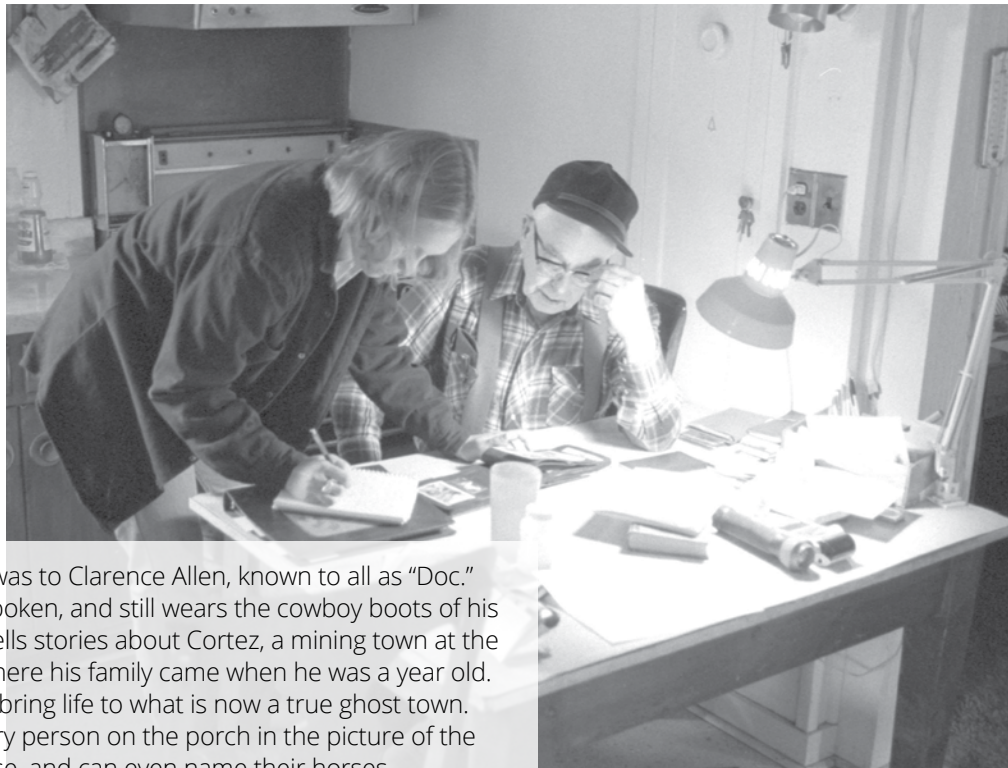
My first call in Austin was to Clarence Allen, known to all as “Doc.” He is tall and soft-spoken, and still wears the cowboy boots of his ranching days. He tells stories about Cortez, a mining town at the north end of Grass Valley where his family came when he was a year old. The old photos he pulls out bring life to what is now a true ghost town. He knows the names of every person on the porch in the picture of the old store and boarding house, and can even name their horses.

Pictures of the ranch in Grass Valley, where the Allens moved in 1919, show his seven brothers and sisters playing on stilts, clowning with a teacher at the ranch’s schoolhouse, and gathering with neighbors, the Waltis and Baumanns, for a Sunday picnic. Most of the kids eventually left the ranch, but Doc stayed on and continued to run cattle on the place until he sold it 20 years ago to the University of Nevada and retired to Austin. Not much is left of the old home place today. The frame house, moved from Cortez where it was an office, is gone, and the adobe milk house has lost its roof and is slowly disintegrating.

It was not an easy life—attempts to homestead and dry farm in Grass Valley after World War I met with no success—but it is all Doc has ever known and it lives on in his memory and his stories.



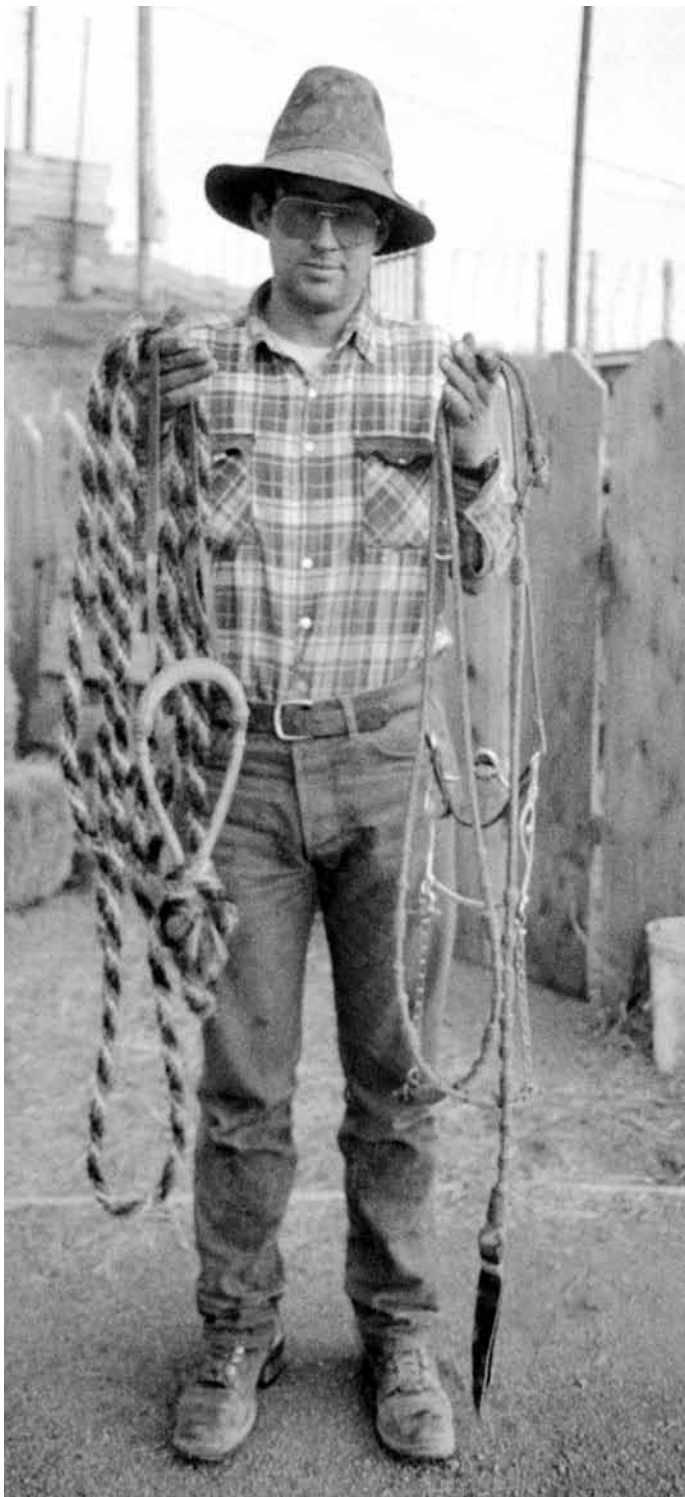
I was referred to Chuck Bispo as a maker of rawhide and horsehair cowboy gear. When I got to his house, he wasn’t home from his job with the county road crew, but his wife Debbie showed me a hitched horsehair necklace he had made. It is incredibly fine work, each tiny link made by wrapping a single strand of horsehair around a small dowel and tying hitches around it.



Doc Allen, Austin, identifies people in his family photo album for folklorist Andrea Graham.

Standing on the porch of the Cortez store and boarding house are John Boitano (left) and Charles Allen, Jr., Doc’s brother. The man behind the horse is Louis Rossi; the horse’s name is Spider. Photo ca. 1916, courtesy of Doc Allen.





Chuck Bispo shows a horsehair mecarty and rawhide reins he made, Austin.

Chuck learned to make horsehair mecarts—twisted ropes that are used as reins and lead ropes for horses—from Benny Damele, who runs the Dry Creek Ranch east of Austin. He uses tail hair because it is easier to get, although mane hair is softer. The hair must be separated by color and “picked” so it is not all lying in the same direction. Then one person twists the hair with a hand drill while another feeds the hair evenly through his hands to form a strand about forty feet long. The strand is then doubled back on itself and twisted together, three more strands are made, and then all four are twisted together to make the final rope. Although he concedes it’s easier to buy a nylon or cotton rope, and probably cheaper considering the time involved, Chuck says, “I’d rather make my stuff. I don’t see no reason to buy it if you’ve got the stuff to make it with.”

Chuck worked for Benny at Dry Creek off and on for ten years, starting at age 15, and it was there he developed his interest in traditional crafts. He became familiar with braided rawhide gear, much of it made by an Indian named Saggie Williams. He taught himself the art with books and practice, and has made one set of reins from scratch: skinning a cow, stretching the hide, fleshing it, removing the hair, cutting it into quarter-inch strings, and braiding the eight-strand reins and decorative buttons. There never were many rawhidiers around, but the few Chuck

knows of were all Indians. And although Lander County is within the region of the buckaroo tradition with its fancy saddles and silver bits, there were few local craftsmen, and cowboys usually ordered their gear from Elko.

I was curious about Benny Damele, and when Chuck and Debbie said they were going out to Dry Creek the next day to help him vaccinate cows, I asked if I could come, too. A call over Benny’s crackling phone line confirmed tomorrow’s job and the fact that I would be welcome.

MARCH 25

As I drove up to Dry Creek Ranch, just east of Hickison Summit, I was impressed by the rock work in the buildings and the restored wagons and hay sleds that crowded the yard. Debbie was fixing lunch but she took a break and walked me up to the corrals above the house. Chuck and another man, Bob Eddy, were vaccinating cows and checking their teeth and horns in a chute. The older man moving the cows down to them, one at a time, greeted me with a cheerful, “Hi, I’m Benny. Why don’t you get a close-up of those cows?”

The next several hours were spent taking pictures of the operation, which was the annual vaccination for the potentially fatal “red water” (*Clostridium hemolyticum*) and the only time Benny uses a chute for his cattle. Benny talked to me about anything and everything between his trips down the alley to fetch another cow. His grandfather came to this country from Italy and eventually bought the Three Bar Ranch in Eureka County. In 1942, Benny’s father bought Dry Creek, which was established in the early 1900s, and Benny has been there ever since.

Chuck Bispo and Bob Eddy check cows and vaccinate for red water at Dry Creek Ranch, east of Hickison Summit.

Benny Damele hitched baling twine around this plastic jug so that when it is soaked in water, the jug's contents are cooled through evaporation.

Benny talked about raising and breaking horses (his favorite pastime), his fondness for the American Bashkir Curly breed, feeding with a team in winter, the advantages of the old-time picket corrals over board fences, the Indian camps that used to be on every ranch in the area, old ways of haying, and more. He is a trove of information, and his friendly nature and sense of humor make talking with him a delight.

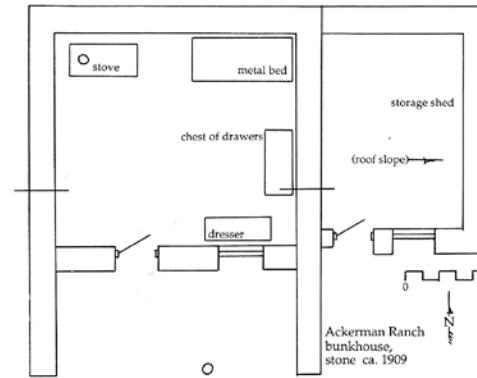
By lunch time (because Benny stays on daylight savings time year-round, it was actually only eleven o'clock), they had checked more than half of the 400 cows. Debbie brought up a Dutch oven full of chicken and rice and everyone sat on the rocks to eat. Benny drank water from a plastic jug he had covered with hitched baling twine and soaked in water to cool the contents by evaporation.

Then it was back to work, assisted by Chuck and Debbie's two kids, Charlie and Corey, who helped by prodding stubborn cows with sticks.

About four o'clock, Bob's wife Pam and son Link arrived from Eureka, where they stay during the week while Link is in school. Soon after, Benny, Chuck, Bob, and another friend came in from moving the cows down below the house, and we all sat down to a turkey dinner. The table was crowded and cheerful, with dogs and cats prowling for treats, and a newcomer was made welcome.

As the living room dimmed, lit only by a fire in the fireplace since Benny has no electricity, the talk roamed to the subject of conservation. Benny and Bob were eloquent in expressing their love and respect for the land, and the stewardship they feel for the country that makes them their living. They live with the land every day, and everything they make goes right back into it. As he walked me out to my truck, Benny said to come back anytime, which I promised to do. He liked the fact that I didn't try to "make him change his ways"—as if that would be possible, had such a foolish idea even crossed my mind.





MARCH 27

Sure enough, I came back to Dry Creek. When I arrived, Benny and Link were making a horsehair mecarty down by the stable. Link was twisting with an old hand drill and Benny was feeding the hair. The whole process took over three hours, a little longer than usual because Benny had an audience and lots to talk about. I had been to the next ranch out the Dry

Creek road—the Ackerman place—which Benny also owns, and he explained that the stone house and bunkhouse there were built in the first decade of the century by Emil Baumann, a Swiss rancher who later settled in Grass Valley. Benny's brother Peter used to live there, as did Chuck and Debbie Bispo when they worked for Benny. The big stone and log buildings are empty now.

Benny talked more about his family and how his grandfather first came to this country to work as a charcoal burner. Eleven years later, he brought his wife and children over, and Benny's father was the first of child of the family born here. He grew up playing with his Italian siblings and the Indian children on the ranch, so that he spoke only Italian and Shoshone when he started school and had to learn English there. Benny still knows the Indian names for the mountains around his ranch.

Link Eddy and Benny Damele equalize the tension of the separate strands prior to twisting them together to make a mecarty.

Benny Damele uses crossed sticks to keep the strands of a horsehair mecarty evenly separated as they are twisted together.

Guys like my dad, they're kind of particular what your saddle horse looked like. He had to have his tail dressed up and his mane combed and...well, that was their hot rod, you know. They chrome the wheels now and one thing and another. They had their tails combed and their manes combed out and...braided and then combed the braid out and leave it wavy. And they had tassels on their cinches, and they dressed their horses up pretty good. It was just a custom; I still do, too, I kind of...nobody out here to look at, I don't ride in parades or a darn thing, but I still dress my horse up. I'm alone half the time, and I've got a silver bit and a hair rope...

—BENNY DAMELE

Benny likes the old ways. He'd rather take an afternoon to make his own horse hair rope than buy a ready-made one. I can see where Chuck got his appreciation for tradition. Benny still keeps a team of horses in shape and uses them to feed hay to the cattle in the winter. One year, after he had "got modern" with tractors and four-wheel-drive vehicles and let his team get out of condition, there was an unusually hard winter. He learned that a tractor that won't start in the cold is worthless, and if the gas delivery truck can't get through deep snow it won't have anything to run on anyway. So now he starts working his team early with a light load, and they are ready to pull a full wagon or sled load of hay come winter.

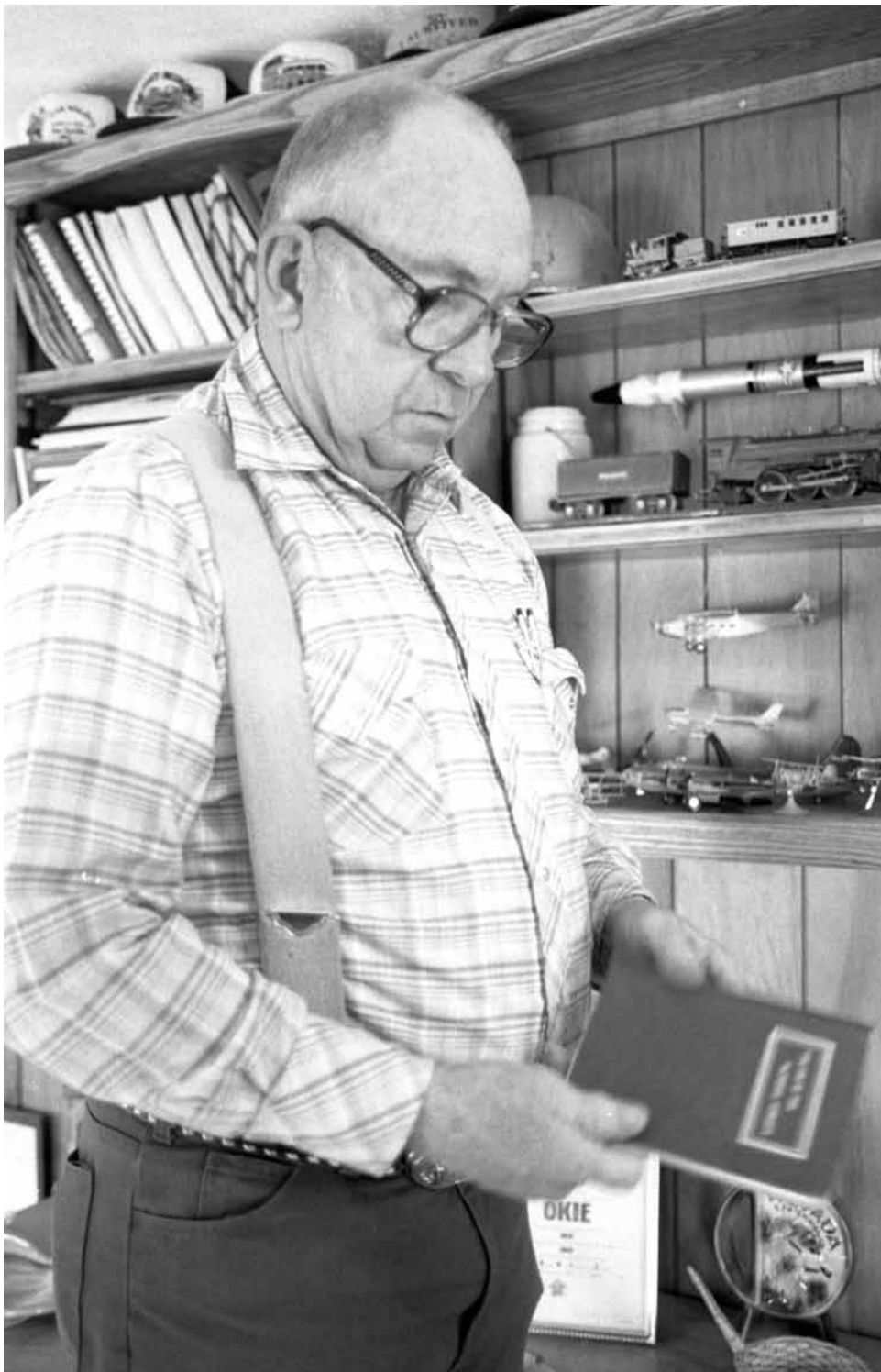
Bob and Chuck helped Benny turn out his cows onto their summer range in the mountains yesterday. They will begin calving in April and by June the calves have to be branded. Benny and his crew will gather small bunches in the corrals he has scattered around, and brand the old way, by roping and throwing the calves to the ground. His brand is the 30, for three Dameles—himself, his father, and his brother—although he is now the only one left.

I stayed for another simple but substantial supper, and spent several hours looking through photos and talking about the old days. Benny says that ranching in this part of the state got off to a slow start for several reasons: first of all, it wasn't settled until the early twentieth century, and then the Depression and World War II didn't allow for much growth with the lack of machinery and manpower. The help they did have, though, was the older men who knew a lot and could work with horses. Benny, who is 58, says, "I'm glad I was born early enough to get in on all the old ways."



Ackerman Ranch bunkhouse, built ca. 1909, southeast Lander County.

Supper table at Dry Creek Ranch. The meal consisted of turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, beans, coleslaw, iced tea, coffee, and red wine.



MARCH 28

I spent the day driving through Grass Valley, learning the lay of the land, and exploring ranches and the old mining town of Cortez. I saw what was left of Doc Allen's old ranch, and the house in Cortez where his family lived—it's one of only three still standing. Doc's parents and Benny Damele's grandfather are buried in the Cortez cemetery. Folks in the north end of Grass Valley used to go to Cortez when they went to town, or on to Beowawe, where the railroad brought in their mail-order goods. The other end of the valley looked to Austin for mail and supplies. Grass Valley, Lake, Willow Creek and Streshley were the ranches in the south end of the valley, and all have the well-built rock barns and outbuildings so characteristic of southern Lander County.

MARCH 29

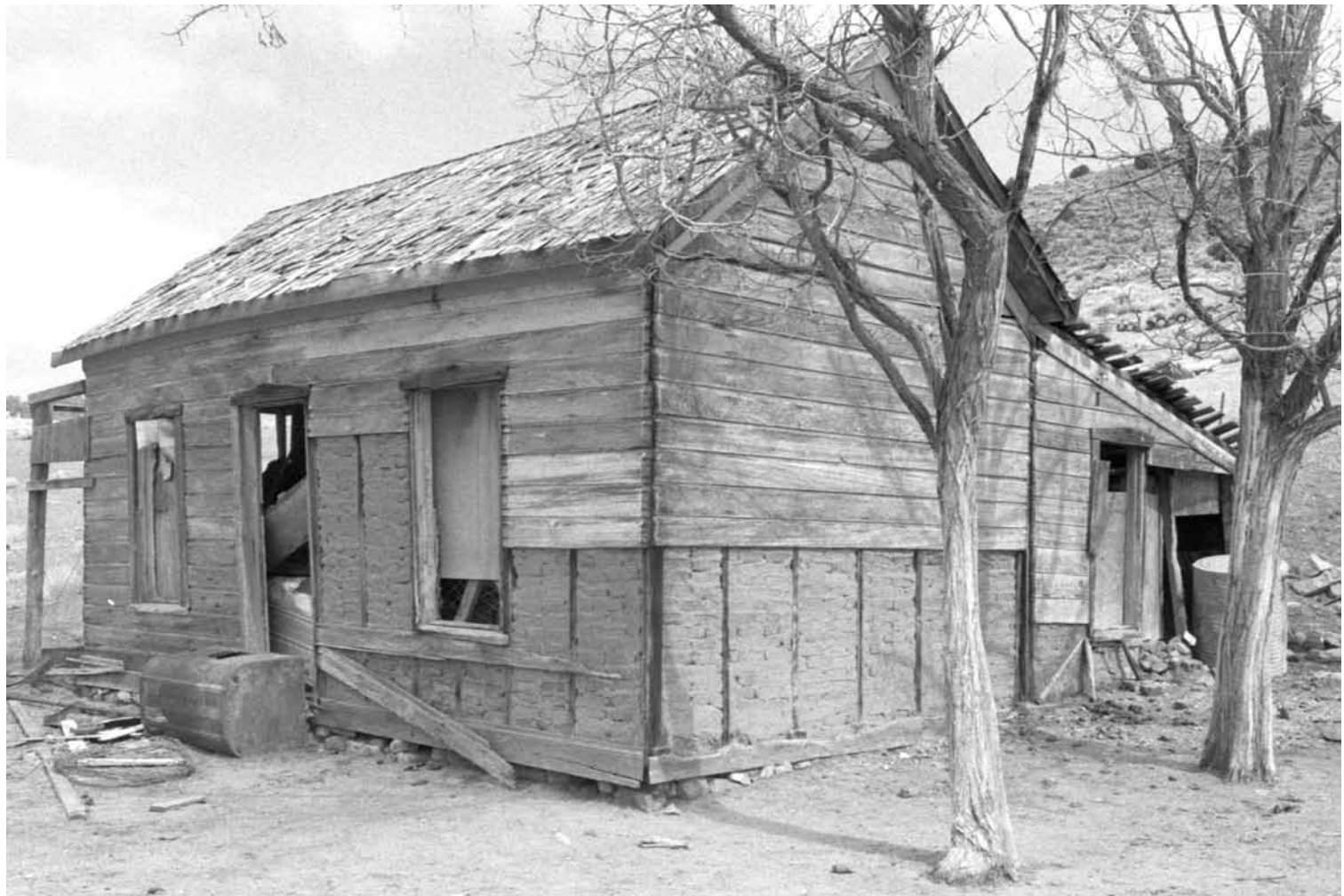
The U.S. Forest Service, which operates the Austin Ranger District Headquarters of the Toiyabe National Forest, has been a part of the Austin community for 80 years. John Kincheloe worked as the ranger in Austin in the late 1950s, and has come back to retire here. He recalls spending six days a week out riding horseback over the district in the summers, checking grazing use and water projects, and spotting fires. He was the lone employee and had an office in one room of his house where his wife did the paperwork. The current office, with eight or ten workers and thick regulation manuals, is foreign to his experience.

Career Forest Service employees are expected to change assignments every few years, so flexibility and adaptability are prerequisites for the job. John says it takes about a year to get to know a territory so you are comfortable in it. Later, Chauncie Todd, one of the current Forest Service workers, said the same thing: in six months, with the help of others on the district, you can be generally knowledgeable about a place, but it takes a year to become "efficiently familiar." That means being able to get somewhere without backtracking.

Government land managers are often not looked upon very kindly by the strongly independent ranchers and miners in Lander County, but at least one government man had enough fond memories to come back and retire here.

John Kincheloe, Austin, in his "little house" where he retreats to his books and model submarines.

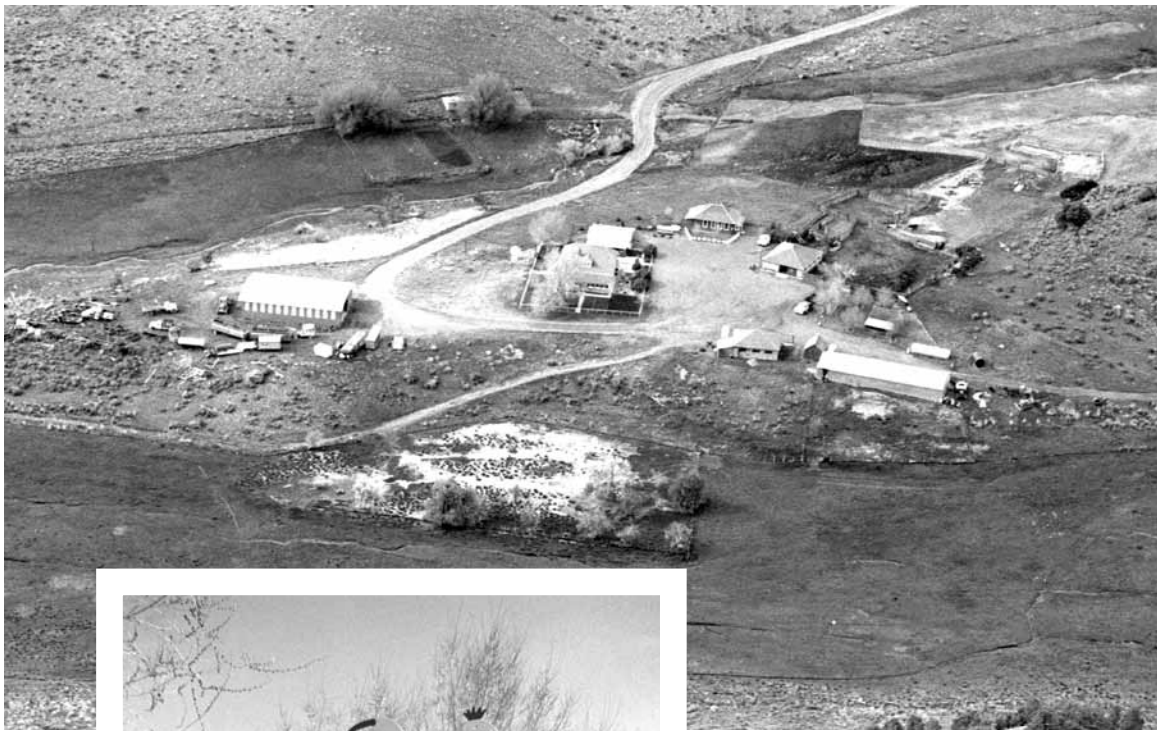
A hall-and-parlor house, with adobe brick in-fill or nogging, Austin. The hall-and-parlor house form (two rooms of unequal size) is ubiquitous in both North American and Northern Europe.



MARCH 30

I noticed two buildings in Austin with *nogging*—bricks filling the spaces between the wall studs and then covered over with siding. These are the first such buildings I've seen anywhere in Nevada; indeed, they are rare anywhere in the new world, especially the west. One house used adobe nogging, with fired bricks in a later addition; the other had fired bricks throughout.

According to Thompson and West's 1881 *History of Nevada*, early Austin had several adobe yards, and local resident Bert Gandolfo told me there was a brickyard and rock quarry at Austin Summit above the town. The large number of adobe, brick, and rock buildings in town, some of them quite imposing, is certainly one of Austin's distinguishing features to this day.



APRIL 1

The Inchauspes at Silver Creek Ranch, north of Austin in the Reese River Valley, are the only Basque ranching family left in an area that once had a strong Basque presence. Paul Inchauspe worked as a sheepherder for his uncle near Ely when he first came to America. After nine years, he returned to Europe, married his wife Grace, and returned to Nevada in 1958 to buy Silver Creek from John Laborde, a fellow countryman. Paul and Grace have three daughters: the oldest and youngest work on the ranch, and the middle one is a nurse in Reno.

Silver Creek Ranch is one of the prettiest places in the county, sitting on a rise at the mouth of a canyon, the frame bunkhouse and the trim on the neat rock buildings painted a fresh red and white. Old wagon wheels, also brightly painted, are used for fences and to decorate the yard. The

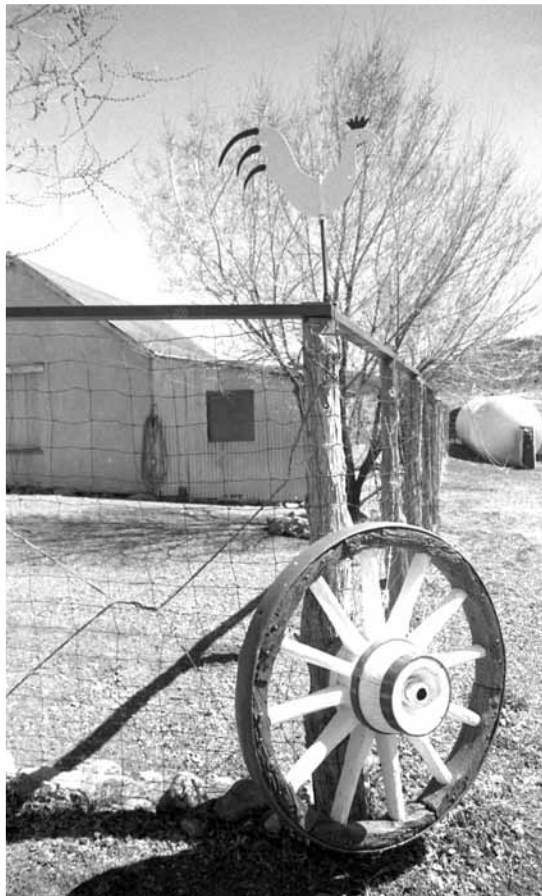
Inchauspes are the last people to run a big herd of sheep in the area, although at one time nearly every ranch had some. Their sheep are leased to Jerry and Janet Lancaster, who live at the Racetrack Ranch ten miles south. My visit to the ranch had missed the annual sheep shearing by about three days. For the last few years they have hired a crew of Australian shearers, who are both fast and careful. The sheep were then moved north for lambing. About June 1, the herders will split them into three bands of 1,000 to 1,200 head each and take them up Big Creek and Kingston canyons for the summer. After the lambs are sold in the fall, the herd will winter down south near Lone.

The herders now are mostly Chilean or Peruvian, and come over on three-year work permits. All the herders used to be young Basques who came to America because they had little chance for a decent living back home. Herding is a lonely life, living alone in a tent during the summer and a sheep wagon in winter, with visitors only every six days when the herders are resupplied.

Silver Creek also runs cattle, which Paul Inchauspe and his daughters manage themselves. The three of them will do all the haying in the summer, and use one of the herders to help with feeding in winter. The Inchauspes keep a small band of sheep at the home ranch for butchering, which they do every couple of weeks. Just a few weeks ago they butchered hogs as well, making hams, bacon and sausage, and rendering the lard. Grace and Pauline, the eldest daughter, were preparing their garden the day I was there, and they always bake their own bread, yet they claimed they “eat just like everyone else—meat and potatoes.”

Silver Creek Ranch, Reese River Valley. The Inchauspes painted the buildings bright red with white trim, and use similarly painted wagon wheels for yard decoration.

A wagon wheel and a cutout chicken ornament the yard at Silver Creek Ranch, Reese River Valley.



Millie and Bert Acree, they played for all those dances when I was a kid. Everybody liked it, it was good music to dance to. It was real danceable music, people would just get wound up. And I can remember, you know that song "Put Your Little Foot" ...people would just bring the house down in those dances. They'd stomp around, and they had a real good way of playing.

I remember when I was a kid that all we did is kind of them old two-step dances, you know, you'd get a girl and you'd dance real stiff, and your back leg would just be aching by the time the dance ended, and usually her songs she'd make them last forever, and then right as she ended it, she'd just start it over again and go right into it a second time sometimes, your old leg would be just quivering and aching. 'Cause you'd do that real stiff little dance where you'd step one back and then you go two forward, and then one back and two forward.

When they got ready to retire, you know, they'd just, they'd say after a dance, "Well this is going to be our last one, we're just getting too old and it's too hard on us and we're not going to do it again," you know. "The next dance, you're going to have to find somebody else."

So the next dance time'd roll around, be Fourth of July or something, and they'd have, say somebody would bring a record player or something down there, and it just wouldn't be the same, you know, and a few people would be dancing, and people would kind of start going home, and here'd come Millie and Bert—they just couldn't stand it, you know. And they did that for quite a few years, they'd just, one more at a time, and then finally they did quit.

—JOE DORY



Joe Dory, Austin, plays one of Millie Acree's favorite piano tunes, Johnson Rag.

APRIL 2

I had talked with Joe Dory, proprietor of one of Austin's two Chevron stations, a few days earlier about his music, and finally got a chance to hear him play tonight. He plays good, solid dance tunes on the piano the way he remembers Millie Acree playing for dances at the old Austin Hotel. Several people had mentioned the Acrees, Millie and her husband Bert, who accompanied on drums, saying that a dance in Austin just wasn't a dance without them. Joe has a tape of them playing in the 1960s, with the hubbub of dancers in the background, and one can just imagine those sounds echoing down Main Street from the second floor dance hall of the hotel. The Acrees are gone now, as is the hotel, but the music lives on in Joe Dory.

Joe says he has always been musical, and he plays an impressive variety of instruments,

including fiddle, banjo, guitar and accordion—all by ear. He grew up in Austin, as did his father before him. Two Dory brothers (who Joe says spelled their name Doree) originally came to Cortez from Canada in the 1870s. One side of the family ended up at the Willow Creek Ranch in Grass Valley, and Joe's side had the Vaughn Ranch in Reese River Valley.

Joe has fond memories of growing up in Austin in the 1950s and 60s. He recalls playing in the forbidden mine tunnels under the town, where he and his cronies hid food and candles. There were movies every Saturday night in what is now the Owl Club, and dances at the Austin Hotel. Ranch families would come in for the festivities every week but, Joe says, the advent of television put an end to those traditions.



Lee Cooley occasionally plays accordion in one of Austin's four bars.

APRIL 4

Joe Dory had recommended that I talk to Lee Cooley, another musician in town, so I caught him at lunchtime today. Lee also said he had always been musical, in fact, "The whole Cooley family seemed to like music." His mother played the piano, and he taught himself to play as well, first learning a tune in his head before transferring it to the instrument. From piano he went to accordion, and he also plays guitar. He used to play frequently in Austin's saloons, but always just for fun—he says he wouldn't enjoy it as much if it were a job. He still plays there occasionally, usually accompanying a group of enthusiastic singers with such favorites as "Green, Green Grass of Home," "Tennessee Waltz," or "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain."



Interior of the railroad tie stable on the Home Ranch, Reese River Valley south of Battle Mountain.

This coursed stone barn at Boone Creek Ranch is typical of Lander County Ranch architecture. Folk buildings usually employ locally obtainable materials in their construction.

Boom trucks operate much like the older hay derricks once did, but with gas engines rather than teams of horses providing the power.

APRIL 18

A primary characteristic of vernacular buildings is that they tend to be built of locally available materials. The Home Ranch, about 15 miles south of Battle Mountain and formerly part of the Jenkins-Marvel Ranches, has examples of just about every possible local building material. The house is frame (locally called a “lumber house”); the barn is built with used railroad ties from the Nevada Central that ran between Battle Mountain and Austin; two rock cellars sit behind the house; a small adobe building was evidently last used as a chicken house; and a cement floor surrounded by window and door frames and piles of bricks marks the site of yet another structure. The only construction method not represented is log.

Ranches in the southern part of the county tend to rely strongly on rock construction, especially for barns, stables, and other outbuildings. Adobe is also common, both in brick form and built up in solid walls. Railroad tie buildings are often seen in the northern regions, along the routes of the Southern and Western Pacific lines and the former route of the Nevada Central. Lumber and brick buildings are found less frequently, probably due to prohibitive cost and transportation difficulties, but there are some fine examples in surprisingly remote locations.

Another highly-visible feature of the Home Ranch is a large hay derrick, rigged with the boom up as if ready to stack. Before the advent of balers in the 1940s, derricks were used to stack loose hay. Almost every rancher over the age of 50 remembers the large crews of hay hands necessary to rake the mowed hay into windrows and shocks, fork it onto wagons, and stack it with a derrick. There were homemade wooden derricks in several different styles, manufactured Jenkins and overshot stackers, buck rakes and beaver slides. Today with baling machines and boom trucks, which bear a distinct resemblance to the old derricks, a few people can do the work that used to take a crew of twenty.



Hay derricks are most often found where hay fields are irrigated, and railroad tie buildings (such as the stable on the right) appear near railroad lines. This is the Home Ranch south of Battle Mountain.





Doyle Davis, Battle Mountain, plays old-time fiddle and backup guitar.

The fiddler's contest at Gridley Days in Austin is the only event of its kind in Nevada.

Doyle Davis and his wife Beulah came to Nevada from Texas 25 years ago to raise alfalfa seed in the Reese River Valley, halfway between Battle Mountain and Austin. The enterprise was not a success, but they have stayed on in Battle Mountain. Both Doyle and Beulah are from musical families. Beulah's father was A.C. "Eck" Robertson, who made the first commercial country music recording in 1922 and was known as "The World Famous Cowboy Fiddler." Doyle and his brothers all grew up playing music, and he and Beulah both recall falling asleep as children at the Moose Hall dances in Texas where their families played.

Doyle is a fine old-time fiddle player and also plays a strong backup on his big homemade guitar—in fact he prefers it to the fiddle—but has little chance to play these days because there aren't many other old-time musicians around. A few Lander County residents recall the dances that used to be held in ranch houses or mining camp schools or the Masonic Hall in town, but those traditions are gone. For a few years there was a fiddle contest sponsored by the Owl Club in Battle Mountain, but now the only contest in the state is held during Austin's Gridley Days in June.



APRIL 19

The Western Shoshone Indians were the original inhabitants of what is now Lander County, and their current small colony in Battle Mountain belies their influence on the county's folk culture. Almost every ranch had its Indian camp of one or two families who worked as skilled horse breakers, hay hands, and buckaroos. Indians were also known for their skill in making rawhide and horsehair cowboy gear.

The tribal smoke shop on the west end of Battle Mountain has a case with beadwork and buckskin items for sale. The first people mentioned when I asked who in town did such work were Berdine Ramos and her mother Isabell Decker. Berdine and her husband Dan, who works for Battle Mountain Gold, are both strong advocates for traditional Shoshone ways and I spent five hours talking with them about their culture. Berdine explained her mother's skill at tanning and smoking buckskin, and expressed her own desire to learn the art. Berdine does the beadwork on gloves and moccasins made from the hides.

Berdine was born at Reese River, where the Yomba Indian Reservation is today. Her mother was raised at the Silver Creek Ranch. Berdine's father, who is 88, remembers many of the tribe's ancient traditions, including a gambling game that used colored chips in a flat basket, and stories about water babies who live in springs in Smoky Valley, and little mountain men who live in caves. Older members of the tribe still use traditional Indian medicine and spiritual practices, although it is getting harder to find people who know how to pray in the old way. And the *fandangoes* (called *powwows* by younger people) that Saggie Williams used to organize twice a year for spiritual renewal have not been held for several years; he has been sick, and no one else has taken on the job.

APRIL 20

I had heard so much about Saggie Williams—from Berdine, and from Benny Damele, who has some of his rawhide work—that I was really looking forward to meeting him, and I was not disappointed when I did. Saggie, who is Berdine's uncle, grew up on the Silver Creek Ranch and worked for years as a buckaroo on the Marvels' 25 Ranch and later the Licking Ranch just north of Battle Mountain. He is a big, strong-looking man, well rooted in his Shoshone heritage. When I visited, he was resting in bed in his living room after a trip to the Elko Hospital, surrounded by his wife Gladys, son Richard, and daughter Faye Jackson. Gladys was sewing beaded roses onto buckskin for a cradleboard cover and brought out a bag full of other beadwork made by her Paiute mother and herself. She also had the willow frame for the cradleboard, and several willow "bonnets," as she calls the cradle's sunshade.

Many Indian children are still raised in a cradleboard, or "baby basket," for the first year or so of their lives. Baskets are never made before the birth of a child; to do so might tempt fate. The one Gladys is working on now is a custom order and just for show.

Richard brought in some of Saggie's rawhide work—a large bosal, reins, and a quirt. His gear is solid and made for hard use. Chuck Bispo models his work on Saggie's, saying that while it may not be fancy or delicate, it certainly holds up for a working buckaroo.



Isabell Decker—Berdine's mother and Saggie's sister—was also everything I had been promised and more. She described in detail the steps in making buckskin, starting with the proper way to skin the deer. The hide should be pulled off in one piece, not cut with a knife, and a freshly killed deer is easiest to work with.

Yeah, when they get [a cradleboard] they'd rather have that than laying in bed. And it's no danger, when you leave them in there and you lean them against something, you can go out and do things you want to do. You're not afraid that he's going to run away, he's going to go here, you won't find him, looking for him...He [her son Richard] was a big baby. When he grew up, he love his basket. He didn't want nothing to do with laying in bed. He'd rather go grab this one and crawl in himself and go to sleep. Nothing bothers him.

—GLADYS WILLIAMS

You know I did, and I still believe it, too, is like your mice, and that, underground? Always watch them, because they can feel that, like the earth move, way before you can. And if you start seeing mice and that clear out of the mine there, then get the heck out of there 'cause it's like earthquake or something's not right or something's getting ready to cave in. They feel and sense that, which is weird.

—BRUCE WOODS

My dad had a turquoise mine and we were down in it there one time and he's feeding this little mouse. And he had this kid working with him, he started throwing rocks at the mouse. And my dad got mad and told him, "Leave the mouse alone." He said, "If he leaves, I'm leaving!" He knows, and he fed that little mouse all the time, and then one day it took off out of the thing and he run out there, and all of a sudden things kind of shook and when he went back in there everything had kind of caved in.

—JERI WOODS

These days, good hides are hard to come by unless you kill the deer yourself. Isabell has to make do with hides salvaged from the dump, where hunters throw them; often they are cut and full of holes, which makes them hard to smoke and tricky to cut for sewing. The hide is soaked in water, scraped with a rib or hip bone to remove the hair, and tanned in brains to make it soft. The hardest part of the job is drying the tanned hide, which must be done by constantly stretching and pulling until it is completely dry. In the old days, drying was done outside in the sun and wind, but today Isabell works inside by a wood stove, and can put a partially dry hide in the freezer and return to it later if she's interrupted—not all modern conveniences are antithetical to traditional culture.

Isabell gathers clean cedar bark to smoke her hides to a golden color. Two hides are sewn together into a tent, which is hung over the smoldering bark and watched carefully until just the right color is achieved. She and Berdine sew moccasins, work gloves, and fancy fringed and beaded gloves out of the hides, which still carry the aroma of wood smoke.

Isabell admits that, "I just don't feel good when I just sit." Her hands are always busy with knitting, crocheting, braiding rugs, quilting, or making plastic flowers for memorial wreaths at the senior center in town. Just the day before she had gone up Reese River to get a bucketful of willows, and had already split some for making into cradleboard sunshades. She learned willow work from her mother, and used to make several kinds of baskets. Willow work is another fading art, and few young people seem to have the interest or the patience to learn the skills involved.

MAY 3

Mining has been the lifeblood of Lander County from its very beginnings. And although the flow of gold and silver has sometimes slowed to a trickle, it has never stopped, and today is the source of yet another boom in central Nevada. Bruce Woods was raised in Austin and has been an underground miner for over ten years, although he currently runs a bulldozer at Austin Gold Venture's open pit mine south of town. He recalls the difficulties of breaking into underground mining and gaining the respect of the old-timers. It took him more than six months of breaking *donies* (rocks) for the *grizzly* (grate) before the older miners would start teaching him the tricks of the trade.

And there are lots of tricks to underground mining, starting with its rich language and specialized terminology. Almost every sentence out of Bruce's mouth had to be followed by several more to explain in layman's terms what he meant. The roof of a mine tunnel is called the "back"; the sides are the "ribs"; and the floor is the "bottom" or "sill." It's as if you were inside a living creature. There are drifts, raises, stopes, shafts, declines and inclines. A miner is called a "digger," and his work clothes are "diggers." There are "day's pay hands" who get the basic hourly wage, generally about \$12 today; and then if you "turn on the air," there's the chance to earn "gypo," or bonus money per foot drilled, per rock bolted or per timber installed. A hard worker can make very good money underground, but as Bruce says, "If you snooze, you lose."

The sequence of work in a mine is to drill, blast, muck, and bolt or timber. Two men work together as partners at the face, drilling a pattern of blast holes. In smaller mines, the holes are generally six feet deep and are made with jackleg drills. The holes are then filled with "prill," a mixture of ammonium nitrate and diesel fuel, and dynamite, with blasting caps timed in a sequence to set them off. The round is then "shot" or blasted, the rock is mucked, or dug out, and the new length of drift timbered or bolted to stabilize it. Since most of Nevada's underground mines are hard rock, little timbering is required except in "bad" or "ravelly" ground. And in the larger mines such as Kingston Canyon, which use diesel-powered equipment and require large drifts, both the size and the cost of timbering are prohibitive. Instead, galvanized steel mesh is put up on the back and held with long bolts drilled into the rock.

Bolting is the most dangerous work, where a miner is most likely to get "slabbed," or have a chunk of rock fall on him. Bruce has had his share of accidents, but none serious. Obviously, safety is crucial in a mine, but he says, "If you're scared, you might as well get the hell out." In comparison, Bruce says his current open pit job is the easiest work he's ever done. But he misses the challenge and variety of working underground, and has halfway talked himself into going back.



GLOSSARY OF MINERS' TERMS

back, n. the roof of a mine tunnel.

bald-headed, adj. a drift that has no timbers for support.

boot, v. when the charge in a hole does not explode all the way back; see bootleg.

bootleg, n. a section of rock that is not broken after a blast, the result of booting.

bottom or sill, n. the floor of a mine tunnel.

burn, n. the center hole in a blast pattern, containing no powder, toward which the rock breaks when shot.

day's pay hand, n. a miner who receives only the hourly wage with no gypo.

digger(s), n. an underground miner; the clothing worn by a miner.

drift, n. a horizontal mine tunnel.

face, n. the working end of a mine tunnel.

grizzly, n. a metal grating which allows only rock and dirt of a certain size to pass through.

gypo, n. bonus money earned per foot of drilling, per bolt set, etc.

gypo, adj. a small, low-budget mine that is just getting by; "a gypo outfit."

missed hole, n. an unblasted hole still charged with powder.

nipper, n. someone who fetches tools for miners; a "gofer."

pie can, n. a lunch pail.

put the ding on, v. to borrow money from someone.

raise, n. a vertical or near vertical upwardly dug tunnel.

rap wrench, n. a small pipe wrench with a hammer head behind the jaws, also called a buzzy. An indispensable tool for every underground miner.

ribs, n. the side walls of a mine tunnel.

rifle, adj. and n. a blast that shoots back out into the drift when the rock does not break toward the center of the blast pattern.

shaft, n. a vertical or near vertical downwardly dug tunnel.

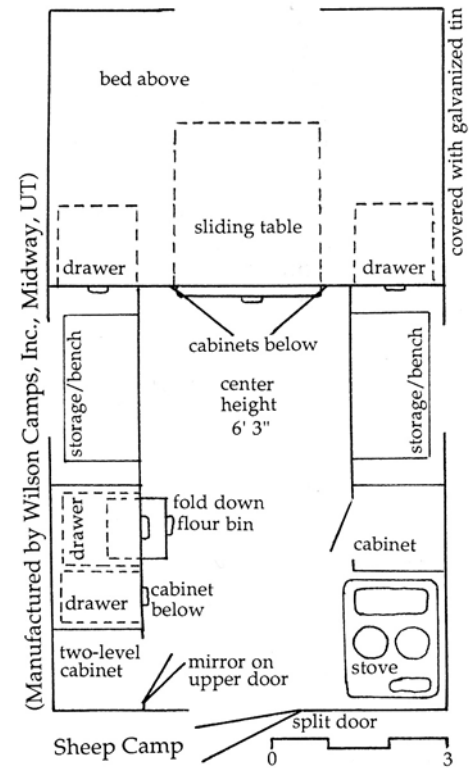
slider or slide rail, n. a rail laid sideways against and inside an upright rail that temporarily extends the rails' reach for an ore cart until another upright rail can be fitted; also, a bar tab.

stope, n. upward trending workings in a vein of ore.

stoped out, adj. when a miner is physically and/or mentally unable to work underground any more.

tramped, v. to be fired from or to quit a mine.

tramping down the pike, v. traveling to another job or looking for work.



The contrast between the dark confined world of the underground miner and the wide open spaces of the cowboy and herder was brought home as I drove from my conversation with Bruce to the Hall Creek Ranch down Reese River, where Jerry Lancaster was looking after the Inchauspes' sheep. Yet both jobs require the same breed of worker—independent and industrious—and both require a deep knowledge of, and respect for, the land.

Sheep camps, such as this Wilson Camp, are used by Jerry Lancaster's South American herders. Almost all sheep camps have the same interior layout.

Jerry and a Chilean herder (who is living in a sheep camp at the abandoned Hall Creek Ranch) had just turned out their horses after moving several straggling sheep. For the last few years they have used a new system during lambing. Instead of moving the main herd each day and leaving the new lambs with their mothers behind to take it easy, they simply turn the sheep loose—a few hundred head up each canyon--and let them lamb on their own and undisturbed. Since sheep tend to drift uphill, they will all eventually migrate south along the Toiyabes where the land rises. About ten days from now, when the ewes have all lambed, each of three herders will be outfitted with a tent and sent up into the mountains for the summer to watch over his band of sheep.

They will move their belongings on a pack horse, and every six days come down for food, which includes eggs (packed in a can with grain for protection), bacon, canned milk, meat, wine, and the bread which Janet Lancaster bakes every few days.

The Lancasters came to Nevada four years ago from California, and Jerry is pleased with the lack of disease in the sheep here. He doesn't ever have to vaccinate because the climate is dry and the sheep are spread out, unlike the damp and crowded conditions in California. There used to be almost 80,000 sheep in Lander County alone, and many ranches started as sheep outfits before they ran cattle. Today there are only 36,000 head in the whole state. Still, Jerry says, the sale of lambs and wool, which now brings \$18 a pound, makes him a good living.



On the way back from Hall Creek, I stopped at the Iowa Canyon Ranch, also owned by the Inchauspes but no longer lived in. There is a magnificent brick house, large rock barns and sheep sheds, and lots of water. One comes on such unexpected sights surprisingly often in Lander County. Sometimes they are tucked away in a canyon, like the stone house at Silver Creek, built by Italian stonemasons; the cut and dressed tufa stone barn on the Vaughn Ranch; the stone Callaghan house in Grass Valley; and the brick house at Iowa Canyon. Others are visible for miles in the valleys: the large brick house at the Visbeck Ranch south of Austin, the unusual brick horse barn at the Racetrack, and the big abandoned adobe house on the old Daniels Hay Ranch just south of the county line in Smoky Valley. These and many other fine buildings clearly indicate that just because ranchers were isolated physically does not mean they were culturally naive.

On a hill above the Iowa Canyon house are the remains of two small houses made of poles and mud. This was where the ranch's Indian families lived, and similar houses are found all over central and southern Nevada. They are called "mud houses," or "mud-and-willow," or "Indian houses," because they were commonly built and used by the area's Shoshone Indians. They are made by placing posts—usually of cedar—in the ground about three to five feet apart, nailing willow saplings horizontally across them inside and out, and packing the space between with mud. The shallow-pitched roof is made of poles covered with willow twigs, brush, and dirt. While there is no evidence that this building technique or the rectangular house form are indigenous to either the Shoshone or Paiute, they seem to have adopted it and most local residents associate it with the Indians.

But not all mud buildings are small cabins. The massive mud barn on the Visbeck Ranch, measuring 37 by 50 feet, takes the construction technique to its extreme. Mud buildings seem to be unique to the central Great Basin, and Lander County has some of the best examples around.

MAY 4

A lot of what I heard about mining from Bruce Woods went right over my head, but I was glad of even that minimal knowledge when I went underground at Nevada Goldfields' Kingston Canyon Mine. Bruce was right when he said it was an impressive operation. Darrell King, the safety director, outfitted me with rubber boots, a hardhat, and a self-rescuer on a belt, then drove us up Kingston Canyon and through a series of switchbacks to the mine portal. When the muck from a blast is brought out, it is piled in one place and marked. A sample is then assayed and the pile spray-painted "W" for waste, "SG" for subgrade, "LG" for low-grade, or "HG" for high-grade, depending on the assay results.

Next the ore is crushed to about two inches in diameter and dropped through a grizzly down a bore hole. It comes out on a conveyer belt 500 feet below and runs out a tunnel, where it drops another 100 feet and is loaded into trucks to be taken to the mill for processing. The bore hole conveyer system was recently installed, and saves the ore trucks from having to drive up the narrow road to the mouth of the mine. One of the contractors on the conveyer job was Benny Damele's nephew Bernard, whom I met at the Ackerman Ranch a month ago. The interconnections among people in Lander County never fail to amaze me.

The brick house at Iowa Canyon in the Reese River Valley is an unusually grand ranch dwelling.



One of two "mud" houses on the Iowa Canyon Ranch, Reese River Valley. Buildings of this type are concentrated in central Nevada and are rare elsewhere.



This rock crusher at the mouth of Kingston gold mine breaks rocks to a size that will pass through the grizzly or grate. They fall down a bore hole to a conveyor which carries the ore to the truck loading area.



Drilling holes for setting roof bolts is the most dangerous job in the Kingston underground gold mine.

One of two powder magazines in the Kingston gold mine. Prill and dynamite are kept in one, caps and fuses in the other.

We stopped at the machine shop, carved into the rock just inside the mine, to be outfitted with battery powered headlamps. The next stop was the “doghouse,” where the men eat lunch and keep their slickers, waterproof overalls and jackets worn underground. The idea that we were hundreds of feet underground and at the same time at 8,000 feet elevation was a little tricky to comprehend.

The huge entrance chamber stretched 10 or 15 feet above our heads, and drifts ran out of it in several directions. Each drift is identified by large spray-painted numbers, but I’d have been lost in a minute without a guide. The air was slightly hazy with moisture and graphite dust. We stopped at the powder magazines, one for prill and dynamite, the other for caps and fuses. Darrell sketched a typical blast pattern, with a five hole burn in the center, a box of holes around it, and perimeter holes around the edge of the face. The center hole is the “burn” and has no powder, which allows the rock to break toward the center when it is blasted. The four holes around the burn are fired first, then the holes forming the larger square or “box,” then the holes at the top and sides of the face, and finally the “lifters” across the bottom, which lifts the muck up and out so it is easier to remove.

Kingston uses non-electric blasting, or “non-el,” because of electrical storms in the mountains and stray current. Caps and fuses are available with fifteen different time delays, fractions of a second apart. They are placed in dynamite sticks in each of the 40 or so holes of a round, and connected to a primer cord which is hooked to the main fuse. The fuse burns between 40 and 50 seconds per foot and is made long enough to give the miners time to get away before the blast. Blasts are timed to occur at the lunch break or shift change to allow time for the dust to clear before the next shift starts mucking. Kingston uses a “jumbo,” a large electric-powered drilling machine, although jackleg drills are still used to put in roof bolts. Diesel-powered muckers and haul trucks roar through the mine, briefly illuminating the darkness that is normally cut only by the beams of headlamps. The drifts at Kingston are relatively large to accommodate the equipment, but the knowledge that we are inside the mountain makes me a little claustrophobic. I can only imagine being in an old mine worked with hand equipment where the drifts are only six or eight feet square. No wonder underground miners get “stoped out” so young.

There are currently no women working underground in the Kingston mine itself, but they do work in the mill and assay lab. Ore from every blast is assayed to determine its grade and how it should be processed. Assaying is partly an intuitive art, much like cooking, and an experienced assayer relies as much on feel and appearance as on the delicate electronic instruments in the lab. Nevada Goldfields has been getting about 1.8 grams of gold per ton of ore, a much higher yield than the open pits, and necessary to justify the greater expense of underground mining. Mining depends heavily on the skill and experience of the workers as conditions are constantly changing. As Bruce Woods says, “You never get bored.”



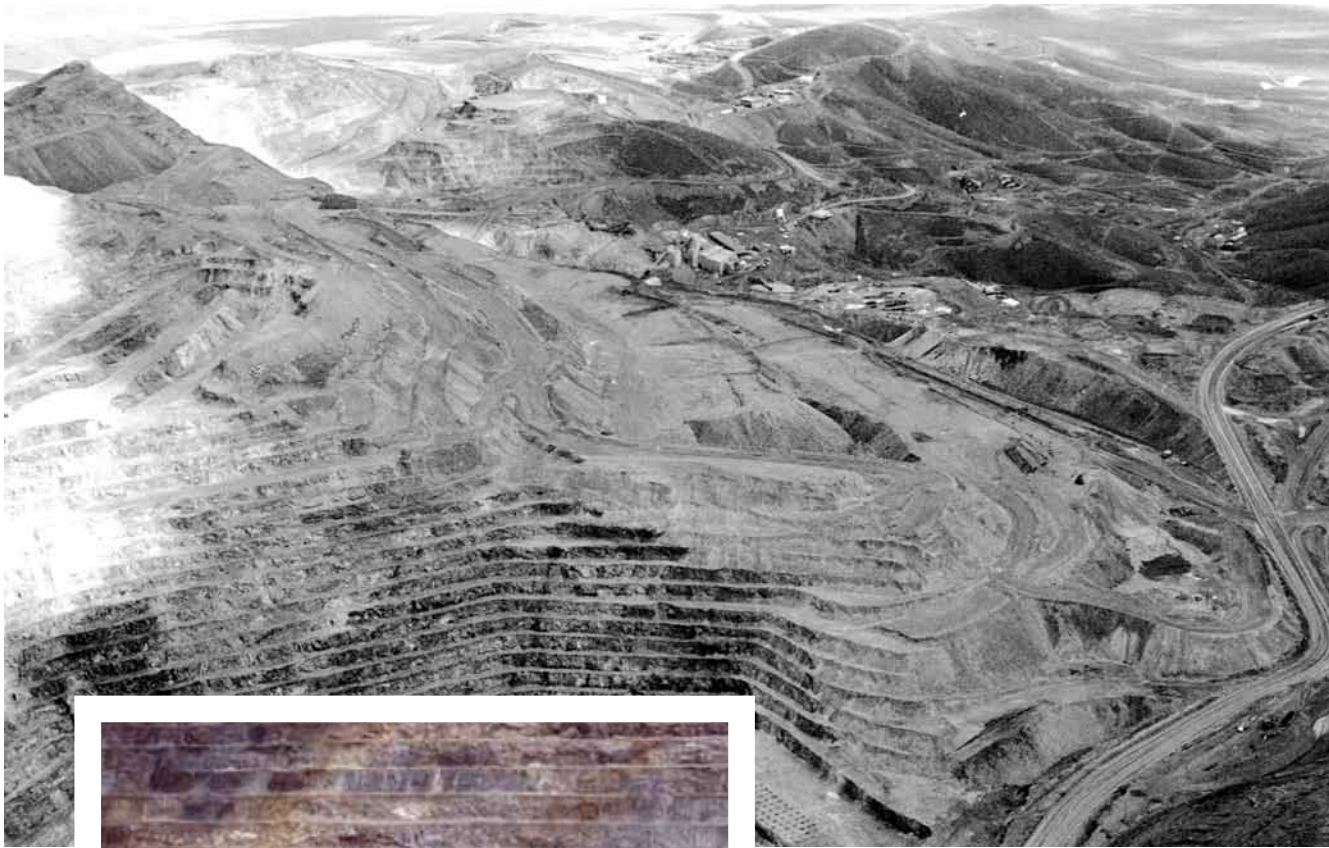
On the way from Austin to Battle Mountain, I stopped at Boone Creek Ranch to visit with Dolly Ruth Ansolabehere and her niece Mary Jean. They have run the ranch since Dolly’s husband John died in 1968, and it has not been easy. Dolly is a vigorous 80 but, as she doesn’t ride, most of the cow work falls to Mary Jean, who came here from the French Basque country 28 years ago. Dolly was raised in Austin, the daughter of the first woman sheriff in the U.S., and taught school there until she married and moved to the ranch in 1945. Although she had a lot to learn about ranching, she found life at Boone Creek more relaxing than in town. They run cows and a small band of ranch sheep, which Mary Jean looks after with the help of an Indian hired hand. The ranch sits in a well-watered canyon, and deer come into the yard to eat the crabapples (and the haystacks) in the fall. A more pleasant place would be hard to imagine.



That surprises me to hear you ask that [about mine etiquette] because a lot of people don’t even think of anything like that. Yeah, there is etiquette. You don’t shine your light in other people’s eyes. You’ll see a lot of times...people who used to work in mines will not look right at you, you know, head on like this; they’ll kind of keep their head turned off to the side. I get laughed at because sometimes if I’m talking to somebody and I said, “Well, you know, look over there [he looks to the side and shakes his head],” and we’re out like this—well, what the hell is that all about? Because underground you use that with your light, you’re shaking your light, to point out something. And also, you want to make sure people running equipment see you, that once you step in the clear, then you don’t move again, until that person has passed you because he’s looking at a lot of different things. Once he spots you he knows where you’re at, and he’s going to rely on you staying there.

—DARRELL KING

Marlys Beard uses long tongs to remove samples from an oven in the assay office at the Kingston gold mine. Women seldom work underground, but are often employed in the mills and labs.



MAY 5

Since I had had the experience of seeing an underground mining operation, I thought it would be enlightening to tour an open pit mine as well, if only for contrast. Well, contrast is what I got. It's easy to see why underground miners sometimes chafe when their open-pit brothers are called miners; in theory the same processes are used—drill, blast and muck—but the environment is completely different. Lou Chambliss, the safety director for Battle Mountain Gold, gave me a tour of their Copper Canyon operation 20 miles south of town. A grid of 32-foot-deep holes is drilled with a big drill rig; powder is loaded and blasted much like underground, although using different patterns (such as a chevron) and on a much larger scale; and the ore is loaded into 75 ton “haul packs” to be taken to the waste dump or the primary crusher for the mill. The men work alone in their machines or marking drill holes with orange spray paint, and there is less specialized language than there is underground.

The milling and assaying operations are the same, although again on a larger scale. You have to process a lot of ore when the yield is less than a quarter of an ounce per ton. Open pit mining is also much safer, since it is more akin to heavy construction work than underground mining. And right now, open pit mining is the backbone of Lander County's economy.



Battle Mountain Gold's Copper Canyon open pit gold mine southwest of Battle Mountain.

Drill rigs make a grid of blast holes in the pit at Copper Canyon gold mine.



After blasting, a front end loader fills a haul-pack which will unload either at the waste dump, or at the crusher near the mill.

MAY 6

John and Willie Marvel's children are the fourth generation of one of the best known ranching families in the state. John's grandfather, W.T. Jenkins, came from Wales and after an unsuccessful stint at mining began a sheep outfit that became the third largest ranch in Nevada, running stock in seven counties. The Jenkins-Marvel Ranches sold out in 1964, but four years later John bought the Dunphy Ranch, just over the Eureka County line, and has run it from his Battle Mountain headquarters ever since. He has been a state assemblyman for ten years and is a strong spokesman for ranching interests.

John sees the disintegration of family ranches today as being due mainly to economic pressures. Big corporations can more easily afford the risks of ranching in the 1980s. The ranch just west of the Dunphy, the T-S, is a case in point: it is owned by Newmont Mining.

Stan and Debbie Thompson work for John at the Dunphy. Debbie is a native Nevadan and has worked on ranches all over the northern part of the state, both as a rider and a cook. Stan's family worked at the White House Ranch in Humboldt County for years. Debbie writes cowboy poetry, and has a clipboard stuffed with the poems she has composed over the last ten years. Her work is inspired by little things that happen at the ranch, such as weaning calves or seeing a flock of birds. She says they come to her all in a rush; then she has to write them down or they'll leave in just as big a rush. She claims she never wrote poetry until she had a blood transfusion when she was 26. She also paints and draws, dowses for water, and has premonitions—none of which happened until after the transfusion.

Debbie likes living on the ranch, where she can work next to her husband. She is very capable, and won't hesitate to build fence, fix a tractor, or run a backhoe. She also looks after the chickens, sheep and horses and raises a big garden, not to mention bringing up three kids. "You've got to do for yourself," she says. "You can't expect someone else to do it for you."



WEANING TIME

*Well it's that time of year again,
With weaning and things to do.
Cut this one, no that one. Is he too young?
Yeah, those two will do.*

*We worked until way after lunch,
We'd weaned quite a few.
But luck was on our side,
Not a leppie was coming through.*

*We mothered up the little ones,
And turned 'em out to graze.
The little ones had had enough,
And lay down on the grass to laze.*

*The weaned calves would bawl for mom,
And in turn she would call.
But in a day or two it'd all be over with,
'Cause in time they'd forget mom and all.*

—DEBBIE THOMPSON

**Debbie and
Stan Thompson.**

**Editor's Note: a "leppie"
refers to a motherless calf**



Bernice Hooper, Austin.

Bernice Hooper's adobe house in Austin. A two room house with the chimney in the center is sometimes called a saddlebag house.

MAY 8

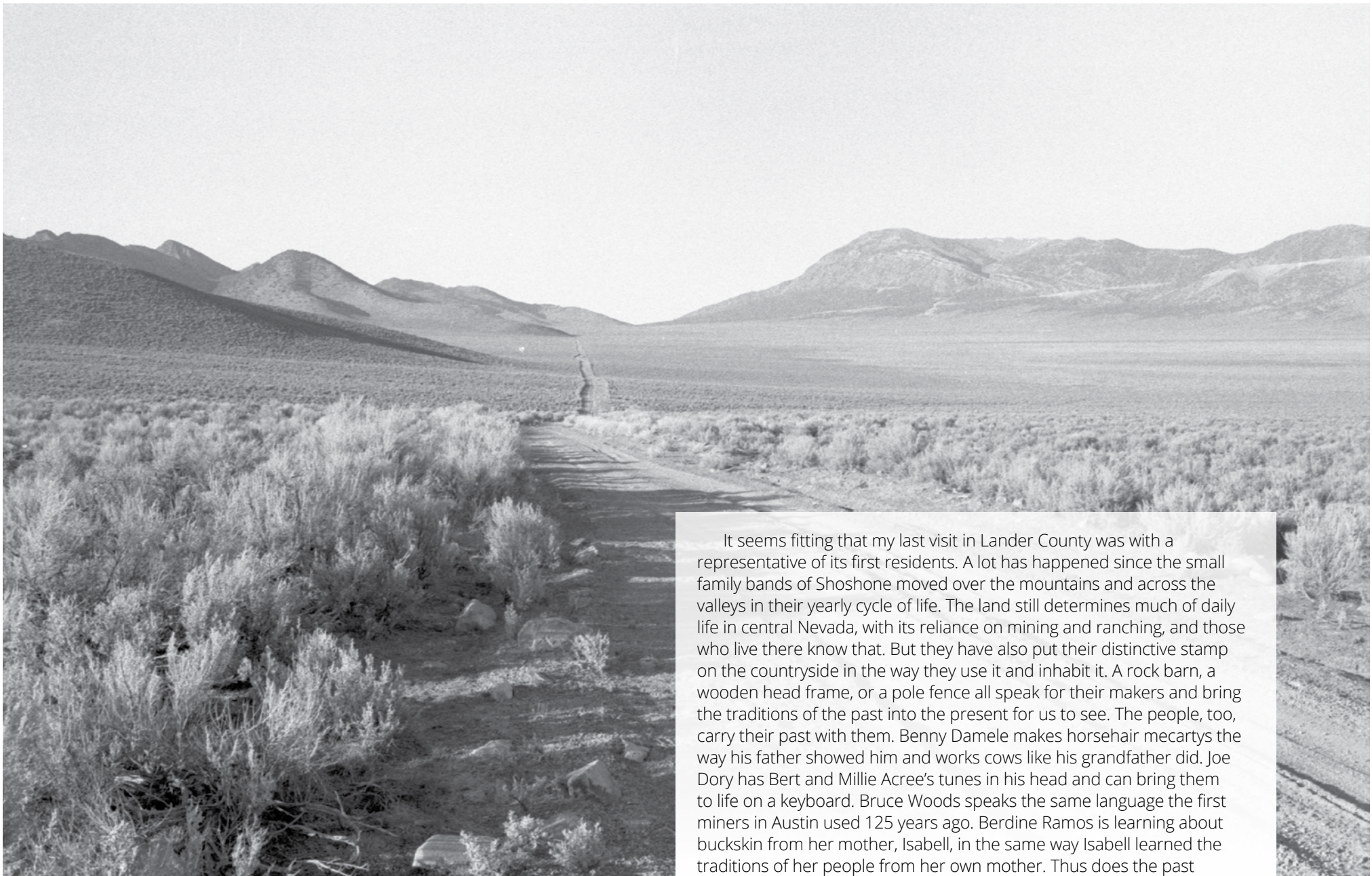
Bernice Hooper is an original, there's no other way to put it. She is Shoshone, born (although she won't say when) and raised in the mining town of Manhattan. She lived on various ranches in Smoky Valley before moving to Austin in 1945 so her daughter could go to high school. She lives there still, in a small adobe house. She has raised several generations of her family, and is currently in charge of her great-granddaughter while the child's mother is at college in Reno. Bernice is always on the go, traveling frequently to Gabbs, Fallon, and even San Diego to visit her children and grandchildren.

Bernice was reluctant at first to talk about her heritage in any detail, but eventually admitted that she has made baskets and cradleboards of willow. And yes, she tans and smokes buckskin to make gloves and moccasins, and does bead work, and knits and crochets and quilts, and makes braided rugs.

While we were talking she leaped up to pull almost-forgotten loaves of bread from the oven, which led to a discussion of traditional Indian foods such as pine nut soup and chokecherries.

As the visit was winding down, she suddenly pulled out two crocheted rugs made of plastic bags that she had been working on. After that came braided rag rugs from a closet, two patchwork quilt tops, a crazy quilt top, pieced hexagonal flowers for another quilt, a crocheted sweater that was quickly appropriated by her great-granddaughter, and several colorful crocheted afghans from some hiding place in her bedroom. And she claimed that most of what she makes has been given away to her family.





Northern Grass Valley.

It seems fitting that my last visit in Lander County was with a representative of its first residents. A lot has happened since the small family bands of Shoshone moved over the mountains and across the valleys in their yearly cycle of life. The land still determines much of daily life in central Nevada, with its reliance on mining and ranching, and those who live there know that. But they have also put their distinctive stamp on the countryside in the way they use it and inhabit it. A rock barn, a wooden head frame, or a pole fence all speak for their makers and bring the traditions of the past into the present for us to see. The people, too, carry their past with them. Benny Damele makes horsehair mecartys the way his father showed him and works cows like his grandfather did. Joe Dory has Bert and Millie Acree's tunes in his head and can bring them to life on a keyboard. Bruce Woods speaks the same language the first miners in Austin used 125 years ago. Berdine Ramos is learning about buckskin from her mother, Isabell, in the same way Isabell learned the traditions of her people from her own mother. Thus does the past become the future.

I watched the Lander County line fade in the rearview mirror, confident that it would still be there when I come back.

—ANDREA GRAHAM, 1988.



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